United Nations

Daily Highlights

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MONDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ Secretary-General, at close of Rio meeting, welcomes new action plan for environmental protection and sustainable development; holds talks with world leaders before returning to New York.

+ "New approaches to international cooperation in space in a changing world" is theme of meeting at Headquarters to mark International Space Year 1992; Committee on Peaceful Uses of Outer Space begins thirty-fifth session.

+ World Food Programme launches emergency airlift to provide wheat to nearly 100,000 people in two districts of Kenya; announces arrival of more food aid to Somalia.

+ Executive Board of United Nations Children's Fund begins 1992 session at Headquarters; to discuss action in Africa, children's needs in Central and Eastern Europe, and Commonwealth of Independent States.

+ The number of people aged 65 and over is expected to increase more than 2.5 times by 2025, according to report by Population Division of the Department for Economic and Social Development (DESD).

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At the end of the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro on Sunday, 14 June, delegates representing more than 170 countries adopted three nonbinding documents calling for environmentally sound sustainable development.

Delegates approved by consensus a Declaration on Environment and Development -- containing principles of policies; Agenda 21 -- a plan for environmental action through the 21st century; and a statement to guide forestry practices. A negotiating process has also been mandated for a Convention on Desertification.

Also, more than 150 countries have now signed both the Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity.

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In a statement delivered at the closing ceremony, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali welcomed the adoption of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, which, he said, "marks a significant advance. It places people at the centre of our concerns. It deals with both environmental and development issues. It reflects a commitment to certain basic principles. It represents a delicate compromise of various perceptions and priorities. The strength of this compromise is precisely that it is accepted by every nation in the world and not just one or another group of nations", he observed.

The Secretary-General further indicated that he was "deeply gratified that as of today 153 countries have signed the Framework Convention on Climate Change and 153 countries have signed the Convention on Biodiversity.

Regarding the Agenda 21, Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali stated that he sees that document as "the centre-piece of international cooperation and of coordination of activities within the United Nations system for many years to come". "We now have an action programme that takes the first steps towards spelling out the concept of sustainable development and planetary development in terms of specific actions", he said.

Before leaving Rio, the Secretary-General met with Edward Perkins, United States Permanent Representative to the United Nations; with President Ion Iliescu of Romania; with President Levon Ter Petrossian of Armenia, with whom he reviewed the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh; and with the Foreign Minister of Tunisia, Habib Ben Yahia.

The Secretary-General also held a meeting with the Secretary-General of the Organization of American States (OAS), Joao Baena Soares, with whom he exchanged views on cooperation matters between the two organizations.

On Saturday, 13 June, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali met with President Jose Eduardo Dos Santos of Angola, with whom he discussed the current situation in that country, as well as the activities of the United Nations Mission in Angola (UNAVEM II). Later, the Secretary-General received the Prime Minister of Austria, Franz Vranitsky, for an exchange of views on the situation in Yugoslavia.

Saturday afternoon, the Secretary-General met with President Aylwin of Chile, with whom he discussed the Chilean initiative on the forthcoming Summit for Social Development and the possibility of an official visit to Chile in the near future in view of the recent suspension of his trip to Santiago due to reasons beyond his control.

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"New approaches to international cooperation in space in a changing world" was the theme for a commemorative meeting held today in New York to mark the 1992 International Space Year. The meeting was in the context of the thirty-fifth session of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space which began today at Headquarters.

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During its session, which is to continue through 26 June, the Committee will review work aimed at reaching agreement on a set of draft principles on the safe use of nuclear power sources in outer space. It will also consider ways and means of using outer space for peaceful purposes and will review spin-off benefits of space technology.

At a press conference at Headquarters this morning, the Permanent Representative of Austria to the United Nations, Peter Hohenfellner, linked the 1992 International Space Year with the just concluded Earth Summit in Rio saying space technology was an important tool in the monitoring of the global environment. He said the "incredible technology" developed to advance all nations' space programmes should "in these troubling times" be applied to benefit planet Earth.

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The World Food Programme (WFP) has launched an emergency airlift to deliver desperately needed wheat to nearly 100,000 people in two districts of Kenya that have been the hardest hit by the drought affecting the country. The Programme has urged international donors to provide additional donations of food.

The airlift, comprising 180 metric tonnes of wheat donated by the European Community, began on 11 June to Mandera and Wajir. It is needed to act as a bridge until food arrives from Mombassa in a truck convoy.

The beginning of the air operation marks the first phase of WFP's relief effort for victims of Kenya's worst drought in years. The WFP estimates that the resulting acute food shortages in 20 districts of Central, Northern and Eastern Kenya are affecting a combined population of nearly 1 million people.

Until now, Kenya has largely been spared food-shortage problems: it has been a net exporter for years, assisting other countries of the Horn of Africa. Beginning in 1991, however, unrest in Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan sent refugees streaming across the border into Kenya to seek safety and food. Faced with the interlocking problems of refugees and a second consecutive year of drought, the President of Kenya this week declared a state of emergency in the country.

In a separate development, the World Food Programme (WFP) has announced that a further 4,000 metric tonnes of emergency food aid has arrived off Mogadishu. The food is a gift from Saudi Arabia.

All the food, enough to feed about 1 million people for one month, will be immediately unloaded and distributed to people most at risk -- mothers, children and displaced people. Following intense factional fighting, the number of displaced people in Mogadishu has continued to rise. Known camps for displaced persons have already reached 186, with more than 300,000 people. Of these, approximately one fifth are children under age of five. The total number of Somalis in need of assistance is estimated at 4.2 million, of which 1 million are in Mogadishu.

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Programmes in Africa are given priority amongst the recommendations to be considered by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Executive Board, which began its 1992 session at Headquarters today. Also under consideration are proposals to deal with the growing number of emergencies, the special needs of children in Central and Eastern Europe and the Republics of the former Soviet Union, and in several developing and least developed countries.

Africa has been given priority because it is the only continent where the number of malnourished and dying children is rising, as a result of causes such as underdevelopment, natural disasters, economic mismanagement, acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), war and inadequate international support.

The Board has before it for approval programme recommendations for Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia and the Middle east, as well as interregional programmes and projects in several developing countries and regions. The total amount of proposed spending from general resources is $451 million, and the total amount of proposed supplementary funding is $616 million.

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The number of people aged 65 and over is expected to increase more than 2.5 times by 2025 -- from 328 million in 1990 to 828 million -- according to estimates cited in a report issued by the Population Division of the Department for Economic and Social Development (DESD).

The report, entitled World Population Monitoring, 1991, reviews past trends and future prospects of the age structure and considers age distribution in a broad framework of global and historic age structures changes. Central to the current report is a decline in fertility rates, which leads to an "ageing" of the population, and an increase in life expectancy, which further tilts population numbers towards older groups.

Countries are grouped into three categories according to the timing of the onset of sustained fertility decline. Those where declines started before 1950, mainly more developed countries, show an almost constant rate - of about 1.9 children per woman - for the next 35 years, with the percentage of older people increasing sharply.

In the less developed regions fertility rates are expected to start declining. The number of children under 15 will still increase, but at a far slower rate than the size of the elderly population. In the least developed countries, the number of children under 15 is expected to have increased by 74 percent between 1950 and 2025, with the global total reaching 2.7 billion. However, worldwide the number of those under 15 is expected to decline to 25 per cent of the whole population by 2025, compared with 35 per cent in 1950.

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